

# *Methamphetamine*



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The potent central nervous system stimulant methamphetamine, or meth, can have dramatic physical and psychological effects. Meth is not physically addictive but it is psychologically addictive. The drug appeals to the abuser because it increases the body's metabolism and produces euphoria, alertness, and gives the abuser a sense of increased energy. But high doses or chronic use of meth, also known as "speed," "crank," and "ice," increases nervousness, irritability, and paranoia.

**Effects on the cardiovascular system include:**

- **Increased pulse**
- **Increased blood pressure**
- **Cardiac arrhythmia**
- **Stroke**

**Other long-term effects include:**

- **Insomnia**
- **Hyperactive behavior**
- **Severe depression**
- **Aggressiveness**
- **Stomach disorders**
- **Weight loss**
- **Paranoid psychosis**
- **Hallucinations (auditory and visual)**

## **Patterns of Abuse**

Methamphetamine abuse has three patterns: low intensity (does not involve psychological addiction), binge, and high intensity. The binge and high-intensity abusers smoke or inject meth to achieve a faster and stronger high; the patterns of abuse differ in the frequency in which the drug is abused and the stages within their cycles.

The binge abuse cycle is made up of these stages: rush, high, binge, tweaking, crash, normal, and withdrawal.

**Rush** (5-30 min.) The abuser's heartbeat races and metabolism, blood pressure, and pulse soar. Feelings of pleasure.

**High** (4-16 hours) The abuser often feels aggressively smarter and becomes argumentative.

**Binge** (3-15 days) The abuser maintains the high for as long as possible and becomes hyperactive, both mentally and physically.

**Tweaking** The most dangerous stage of the cycle. See section below.

**Crash** (1-3 days) The abuser does not pose a threat to anyone, becomes almost lifeless, and sleeps.

**Normal** (2-14 days) The abuser returns to a state that is slightly deteriorated from the normal state before the abuse.

**Withdrawal** (30-90 days) No immediate symptoms

are evident but the abuser first becomes depressed and then lethargic. The craving for meth hits and the abuser can become suicidal. Taking meth at any time during withdrawal can stop the unpleasant feelings so, consequently, a high percentage of addicts in treatment return to abuse.

High-intensity abusers, often-called "speed freaks," focus on preventing the crash. But each successive rush becomes less euphoric and takes more meth to achieve. The pattern does not usually include a state of normalcy or withdrawal. High-intensity abusers experience extreme weight loss, very pale facial skin, sweating, body odor, discolored teeth and scars or open sores on their bodies. The scars are

the result of the abusers' hallucinations of bugs on the skin, often referred to as "crank bugs," and attempts to scratch the bugs off.

## **Tweaking**

The most dangerous stage of meth abuse for abusers, medical personnel, and law enforcement officers is called "tweaking." A tweaker is an abuser who probably has not slept in 3-15 days and is irritable and paranoid. Tweakers often behave or react violently and if a tweaker is using alcohol or another depressant, negative feelings and associated dangers intensify. The tweaker craves more meth, but no dosage will help re-create the euphoric high, causing frustration, unpredictability, and the potential for violence.

A tweaker can appear normal: eyes can be clear, speech concise, and movements brisk. But a closer look will reveal the person's eyes are moving ten times faster than normal, the voice has a slight quiver, and movements are quick and jerky. These physical signs are more difficult to identify if the tweaker is using a depressant. Tweakers are often involved in domestic disputes and motor vehicle accidents. They may also be present at "raves" or parties and they may participate in spur-of-the-moment crimes, such as purse snatchings or assaults, to support their habit.

Detaining a tweaker alone is not recommended and law enforcement officers should call for backup.

### **Six Safety Tips for Approaching a Tweaker**

1. **Keep a 7-10 ft. distance.** Coming too close can be perceived as threatening.
2. **Do not shine bright lights at him/her.** The tweaker is already paranoid and, if blinded by a bright light, is likely to run or become violent.
3. **Slow your speech and lower the pitch of your voice.** A tweaker already hears sounds at a fast pace and in a high pitch.
4. **Slow your movements.** This will decrease the odds that the tweaker will misinterpret your physical actions.
5. **Keep your hands visible.** If you place your hands where the tweaker cannot see them, he/she might feel threatened and could become violent.
6. **Keep the tweaker talking.** A tweaker who falls silent can be extremely dangerous. Silence often means that paranoid thoughts have taken over reality, and anyone present can become part of the tweaker's paranoid delusions.